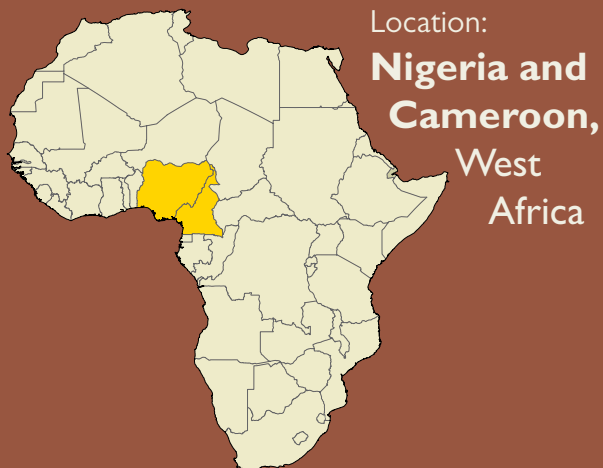# GPS TECHNOLOGY HELPS SAVE AFRICA'S MOST ENDANGERED APE

Project:

Cross River Gorilla Research and Monitoring

Location:

Nigeria and Cameroon, West Africa

Project Leader:

Dr. Rich Bergl, Curator of Conservation and Research, North Carolina Zoo

Partners:

- Wildlife Conservation Society
- Cross River State Forestry Commission
- Cross River National Park
- Cameroon Ministry of Forests and Wildlife

The Rarest of Rare

Inhabiting the rugged highlands on the Nigeria-Cameroon border, the Cross River gorilla is the most critically endangered of all the African

The Cross River gorilla is reclusive and rarely seen.

apes and one of the 25 most endangered primates in the world. This unique type of gorilla (a distinct subspecies) was once thought to be extinct, but was rediscovered by scientists less than 20 years ago. Unfortunately, the survival of these gorillas is threatened by both hunting and habitat loss. It is thought that only about 300 Cross River gorillas are left, fewer than half the number of their mountain gorilla cousins. These remaining gorillas are found only in very remote and mountainous forests where hunters are reluctant to go and where steep slopes prevent farming.

Ruggedized Mobile Computers Give Rangers the Jump on Poachers

One of the major challenges to improving the protection of the Cross River gorilla is making the work of park rangers more effective. To help increase ranger effectiveness, the NC Zoo has developed a data collection system based on rugged handheld computers using global positioning system (GPS) technology and a software package called Cybertracker. With this system, rangers record all signs of gorillas (tracks, nests, sightings, etc.) they encounter in the forest. They also record signs of illegal activity like poaching. The device automatically stores their observation, along with its GPS position.

When the rangers return to base the data they have collected are downloaded to a desktop computer for analysis. The Cybertracker

Field workers now record data directly into hand-held, GPS enabled computers, making data collection more efficient and effective.